

PREFACE

WPI's overarching purpose for this self-study is to gain a better understanding, from an external review, of how well our current mission and goal statements and our strategic planning focus and guide all our activities as an institution of higher education. WPI is committed, through our current strategic planning process, to securing and allocating resources and to assessing the impacts of current and new programs in terms of five strategic goals:

- Goal 1: Enhance the quality of WPI's academic programs
- Goal 2: Develop WPI's position as a national university
- Goal 3: Establish WPI as a leader in global technological education
- Goal 4: Improve WPI's campus culture and community presence
- Goal 5: Expand WPI's educational resources.

Widespread community discussion led to the articulation of these five goals in 1996-99; the five statements represent measurable goals of current priority derived from the WPI mission and goal statements adopted 15 years earlier.

Although formal preparation for the 2001 NEASC self-study began during the 1999-2000 academic year, WPI has been moving toward implementing continuous outcomes-based assessment of its programs for several decades. In the late 1960s, the senior faculty designed an undergraduate program requiring the demonstration of competence in both general and disciplinary education. Under this innovative pedagogical system—which is still largely intact—WPI undergraduates must satisfy both course- and project-based degree requirements. The philosophy of education at WPI is that students must demonstrate that they can function in their discipline at the appropriate professional level, rather than merely pass courses.

During the 1980s, the faculty began reviewing the written accounts of student achievement embodied in project reports required for the bachelor's degree to assess the quality of pedagogy in the overall academic program. In 1996, WPI was selected by ABET as one of the first two institutions to undergo a major professional re-accreditation under ABET's new outcomes-based Engineering Criteria 2000.

Ideally, every activity at WPI should profit from continuous improvement because the whole community—and the many people and constituencies within it—understands

- how their own roles and activities derive from WPI's mission and goal statements valuing learning and research.

- how their success, in accomplishing their objectives, can be measured against agreed-upon metrics.
- how these measurements of success are assessed within the individual, departmental and institutional contexts.
- how these assessments of accomplishments “close the loop” in terms of influencing the ongoing discussion of mission and goals and the ongoing management and allocation of resources.

WPI’s goal in the present self-study is to “reality-test” this ideal situation. What WPI seeks from the 2001 NEASC visit is an independent review of those areas where our outcomes-based approach both to learning and to managing the University are succeeding, and where we require improvement.

To frame the present self-study of WPI’s achievement of these goals, President Edward Alton Parrish appointed a drafting committee in fall 1999 to assess how well WPI was doing in implementing the 11 NEASC standards. Lance Schachterle, assistant provost of academic affairs (Academic Affairs), was designated chair, with other committee members drawn from each vice-presidential division, as follows:

- Yvonne Harris, assistant controller (Business Affairs)
- Terry Pellerin, associate director of plant services (Business Affairs)
- Janet Richardson, associate vice president for student affairs and dean of student life (Student Affairs)
- Helen Shuster, director of library services (Information Technology)
- Barbara Ziff, executive director of advancement services (Development and University Relations).

President Parrish charged the drafting committee with drafting responses to the 11 standards and numerous separate headings (working individually or collectively, as appropriate), involving their respective vice presidents and associates in the drafting process. The committee began work in the winter of 1999-2000, and released successive paper and electronic drafts for general community comment beginning in late February 2001. (By the time it was closed in June 2001, the Web site containing these drafts had received more that 10,000 hits.)

Throughout, the committee’s work was supported by the Student Outcomes Assessment Steering Committee (SOASC), appointed by President Parrish in fall 1999 to coordinate WPI’s ongoing student outcomes assessment activities. Overall, SOASC, chaired by Professor Judith Miller, director of WPI’s Center for Educational Development, Technology and Assessment (CEDTA), involved 12 faculty members, three staff members and three students. SOASC subcommittees meet weekly during the academic year to coordinate accreditation preparation activities (WPI will be visited by AACSB in fall 2001 and by ABET in fall 2002) and to disseminate across campus the best practices developed in departments.

Members of the committee have also met with various constituencies across campus to discuss the draft and the accreditation process. Each member of the drafting committee represented his or her vice presidential division and met with others in that division to talk about the self-study. In spring 2001 the Committee on Governance (a standing committee of faculty governance) charged specific faculty committees with reviewing appropriate draft sections; each governance committee formally reviewed sections, as appropriate, and provided the drafting committee with

ample commentary. Schachterle discussed the self-study procedures with the Academic Planning and Student Affairs Committees of the Board of Trustees at the May 2001 general meeting, and distributed copies to key members for their review. Several drafting committee members met with committees within student government. President Parrish and his Cabinet have been closely involved in the preparation of the self-study. At several stages, President Parrish reviewed the present text, which is presented herein to NEASC under his authority as president of WPI.